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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a study designed to identify factors that have inhibited the success of adult training programs. The investigation looked specifically for key factors or incidents that contributed to program failure. The sample included 51 adult training programs scheduled for implementation between 1988 and 1992 in the Great Plains region of the United States. Twelve programs were canceled for reasons related to the educator and could be classified into three general areas: learner-initiated cancellations related to low enrollments, learner dropout, or learner refusal to return to the program. Educator-initiated cancellations related to educator resignation from the program due to the lack of autonomy. The rationale for administrator-initiated cancellations was the changing nature of the intended outcomes of the educational program. The programs reviewed were typical training programs focused on the adult learner. In a number of instances where the program failed, some component of the traditional adult education program development model had been ignored. Most programs failed because of planning issues, one-fifth failed because of program implementation procedures, and many programs failed because the adult learner was not taken into consideration when designing program objectives and methods. Specific areas in need of attention that were identified focused on pretraining assessments of workers and the environment. (YLB)

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Barriers to Adult Education Training Programs:

Challenges for the Adult Educator

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Running Head: Adult Training Challenges

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Abstract

Adult education programming focused on career enhancement faces many challenges, particularly in relation to traditional adult education modeling. This article provides a discussion of a longitudinal study of barriers to the implementation of career enhancement training programs. Areas of concern for adult educators were found to be focused on learners, administrators, and particularly those delivering programs.

As programming has evolved to encompass a wide variety of content and delivery, the broad term of adult education has grown consistently in complexity and nature. Traditional views of adult literacy instruction or non-traditional formal education programming as a hobby have been replaced with professional preparation and renewal, economic development, and a host of individual, community, and societal needs fulfillment through education (Kreitlow, 1987). Perhaps one of the areas of greatest growth during the past decade has been attention to business and industry training and skill development programs where adults in the workforce are targeted for educational programming (Verduin, Miller, & Greer, 1986).

One of the foremost challenges within the context of workforce adult education programs is the inconsistency with traditional adult education theory and planning. Typical approaches and rationale for such issues as self-understanding, life planning, and changes in intelligence and ability to learn throughout a life-time fit consistently and systematically into the accepted realm of program development, instruction, and evaluation (Hunt, 1992). Even the more radically perceived modeling of transformation theory provides an appropriate "fit" for self-directed learning. The challenge to adult educators, then, is to somehow arrange a largely prescriptive workforce development program to fit the needs, learning abilities, and strategies of adults who may largely be self-directed in personal and professional learning.

To address the issue of extending the andragogical model beyond its basic tenants to workplace training presents several problems for the adult educator in designing and delivering career related professional enhancement adult education programs. Therefore, this exploration into adult educational programming was designed to identify factors which have inhibited the success of adult training programs.

Methods

To fulfill the purpose of this investigation, non-successful adult education training programs were studied, specifically looking for key factors or incidents which contributed to program failure. The sample included 51 adult training programs which were scheduled for implementation between 1988 and 1992 in the Great Plains region of the United States. The training programs ranged from entirely prescriptive ventures for microenterprises relating to technical skill acquisition to leadership development programs with some learner-related needs assessments in larger (250 or more employees) businesses.

Findings

Of the 51 training programs studied, 39 were found to have been canceled for logistical reasons: the inability to complete the education programs within a specified period of time, financial support, the lack of educator or resource (such as video tapes and correspondence/instructional manuals)

availability, and the lack of physical space for education programs. The remaining 12 programs were canceled for reasons within the domain of the educator, and can be classified into three general areas: learner initiated cancellations, educator initiated cancellations, and administrative initiated cancellations.

Learner Initiated Cancellations: Six programs studied were canceled due to learner responses and reactions to the proposed education program. Despite the technical nature of three programs, learners did not volunteer to participate, and programs were canceled due to low enrollments. In one instance, the educational training program was canceled due to learner dropout, and one program was canceled due to the entire class' refusal to return to the training program. In the sixth program, learners refused to attend the training program because of facility safety concerns.

Educator Initiated Cancellations: Three programs studied were canceled because of the reactions of the educators responsible for the programs. In each of these three instances, the educator resigned from the program due to the lack of autonomy. These three programs, each of which were leadership development related, contained portions of pre-developed training packages. Each educator resigned from the program for what one described as "differences of opinion and training philosophy with that intended in the prepared (training) package."

Administrator Initiated Cancellations: In three circumstances, administrators or mid-level management terminated training programs once they had been initiated. The rationale for these terminations was the changing nature of the intended outcomes of the educational program. All programs were to be re-focused to reflect updated or altered learning objectives and were to be rescheduled for later dates.

Discussion

There are fundamental differences in philosophy and purpose between traditional adult education programs and formal professional training programs. For educational training and development programs undertaken by business and industry to succeed, they must be reflective of basic adult education principles or be doomed to failure.

The programs reviewed for this investigation were typical training programs focused on the adult learner. In a number of instances where the program failed, some component of the traditional adult education program development model had been ignored. While most programs failed for what appeared to be planning issues (e.g., logistical support or coordination), over a fifth of the programs failed because of program implementation procedures. Most notably, programs failed because the adult learner was not taken into consideration when designing program objectives and methods. In a like manner, attention to the educator becomes crucial for program implementation, and the

adult educator becomes the catylst for program implementation as well as program success.

The challenges identified here are not new to adult educators, and have traditionally been addressed through in-service workshops, graduate training programs, and professional networking and associations. The experiences brought forth in this review, however, are indicative of an issue which must continue to be addressed and studied as a pragmatic problem: learner involvement in pre-training assessments.

Specific areas in need of attention for the adult educator in relation to pre-training assessments which arose from the data include:

1. Professional worker training programs must be targeted to the adult learner with attention to delivery systems. This will allow the prospective learner to voice concern and develop a sense of ownership for the entire training package.
2. Adult educators must take the entire environment of the training program into consideration when developing programs. The refusal to participate in a training program due to perceived facility safety may be an extreme example, but the ecology of the program must be tailored to the learner.
3. The adult educator must work to bridge the gap between learners and administrators in developing training objectives. The over-dependence on either learners or

administrators will only place an unfair balance of power on either party and delegates controlling interest of the training program to those without the responsibility of educational program implementation.

4. Program flexibility is crucial for the program to succeed. In many of the programs reviewed, the training program could have been revived with an increased amount of logistical and participant flexibility. Had the adult educator responsible for the training program had the flexibility to adjust timelines, reschedule meeting locations, or had more time to recruit and retain learners, then there appeared to be a good likelihood of greater program success.

5. Career training as professional enhancement programs must be coordinated with all parties involved. A good deal of research has implied that the adult educator is simply a teacher, but in many respects, as evidenced in these programs, the adult educator must also serve as a program administrator and must be prepared to stimulate and anticipate learner cognitive development.

The concerns expressed here are merely an extension and formalization of what we have come to expect from the typical adult educator. The concept of research and practice presented here, address the growing issue of training and education, often termed professional career training. Professional career training

represents not only an area of growth, but an area in dire need of scholarly and practitioner oriented attention. The attention which is needed must be able to transcend academic as well as national boundaries, and research adult educators in all walks of life.

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